

10 (SECTION 1).

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Gates

# Booting a chance at the CIA

William Casey's resignation as CIA director had long been expected, and was a clear opportunity to renew and strengthen the agency. But when Mr. Casey quit Sunday, seven weeks after a brain operation had left him partly disabled, the Reagan administration promptly booted the chance. Instead of naming a new director of the prominence and vision the CIA needs, it chose Mr. Casey's deputy director, Robert Gates, and indicated that his job would be to keep things pretty much as they are.

Mr. Gates has good professional qualifications. He joined the CIA in 1966 as an intelligence analyst, has specialized in Soviet intelligence and served on the National Security Council. The bad news is not his

appointment, but the administration's failure to recognize the opportunity it had.

The CIA's part in the Iran-contra arms deals is still unclear, and the agency needs a director who would represent a general tightening of operations and a keener grasp of its role at home and abroad. Among those suggested for the post were former Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee and FBI director William Webster.

But the White House seems to have chosen Mr. Gates specifically because, as presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater put it, he will "keep things on the same course." The policy evidently is to keep everything as is, which may not hurt but does not help.